

Message Text

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TAGS: PINT UK (N.I.)

SUBJECT: PROSPECTS DIMMER FOR POWER-SHARING

SUMMARY: UNIONIST LEADER BRIAN FAULKNER WON 132-105 VICTORY OVER HARD-LINING UNPLEDGED UNIONIST CRITICS IN OCTOBER 23 MEETING OF UNIONIST STANDING COMMITTEE. THUS HE REMAINS IN POSITION TO CONTINUE TALKS TODAY WITH SDLP AND ALLIANCE PARTY AIMED AT FORMATION OF COALITION EXECUTIVE AND EVENTUAL DEVOLUTION OF CERTAIN LOCAL EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE POWERS TO NORTHERN IRELAND GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURES. BUT NARROWNESS OF HIS MARGIN GAVE OPPONENTS OF POWER-SHARING NEW HOPE IN THEIR EFFORTS TO PREVENT UNIONIST-SDLP-ALLIANCE COALITION FORMATION OF WHICH IS ESSENTIAL TO HMG'S CURRENT EFFORTS TO "SOLVE" NORTHERN IRELAND PROBLEM. CURRENT PROSPECTS THAT EXECUTIVE WILL BE FORMED MUST BE LESS THAN EVER. END SUMMARY

1. AT FAULKNER'S URGING, STANDING COMMITTEE ON OCTOBER 23 REJECTED RESOLUTION BACKED BY UNPLEDGED UNIONISTS OPPOSING UNIONIST PARTICIPATION IN EXECUTIVE "WITH THOSE WHOSE AIM IS A UNITED IRELAND. WE STATE CLEARLY THAT IT IS NOT UNIONIST POLICY TO SHARE POWER IN THE EXECUTIVE WITH THE SDLP." ON TV AFTER MEETING FAULKNER SAID HE WAS SATISFIED WITH RESULT
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AND HAD MADE NO POLICY CONCESSION TO UNPLEDGED UNIONISTS TO

ACHIEVE IT. POWER-SHARING TALKS CONTINUE TODAY.

2. BUT VARIOUS PEOPLE PRESENT AT MEETING REPORT THAT FAULKNER DID REPEAT ASSURANCES THAT HE WOULD INSIST THAT UNIONIST PARTY BE GIVEN OVERALL MAJORITY WITHIN EXECUTIVE AND THAT SDLP DENOUNCE RENT AND RATE STRIKE, EXPRESS SUPPORT SECURITY FORCES AND ACCEPT CONSTITUTION ACT. UNIONIST PARTY HEADQUARTERS SOURCE TOLD US THAT NARROWNESS OF FAULKNER'S VICTORY (SUBSTANTIALLY LESS THAN 60-40 SPLIT NORTHERN IRELAND SECRETARY WHITELAW TOLD US WOULD BE SATISFACTORY TO HIM (BELFAST 154) AND THAT MANY OBSERVERS HAD PREDICTED) MEANT THAT FAULKNER WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO SELL UNIONIST PARTY ANYTHING LESS THAN HE HAS DEMANDED. LEADER IN OCTOBER 24 NEWS LETTER, A UNIONIST PAPER WHICH HAS ALMOST ABANDONED FAULKNER ON POWER-SHARING, ECHOED THIS VIEW.

3. UNPLEDGED UNIONISTS CLAIMED THEY WOULD HAVE WON VOTE IF NOT FOR VOTES OF "CO-OPTED" DELEGATES WHO OWE THEIR PARTY POSITIONS TO FAULKNER. (THIS WOULD HOWEVER BE DIFFICULT TO PROVE SINCE BALLOT WAS SECRET). THEY HAVE COLLECTED 30 SIGNATURES REQUIRED ON A PETITION FOR A SPECIAL MEETING OF 900-MEMBER ULSTER UNIONIST COUNCIL (PARTY'S CONFERENCE) BUT REPORTEDLY INTEND TO DELAY SUBMITTING PETITION BELIEVING THAT IT WILL BECOME OBVIOUS IN TIME THAT FAULKNER CANNOT OBTAIN CONCESSIONS HE HAS DEMANDED FROM HMG AND SDLP. BY SAME TOKEN FAULKNER AND HIS SUPPORTERS ARE THINKING OF SUBMITTING THEIR OWN PETITION IN ORDER TO CONTROL TIMING OF MEETING (PROBABLY SOON) AND MOTION BEFORE IT. COUNCIL MEETING IS THOUGHT LIKELY BY EARLY DECEMBER AT LATEST.

4. IN DEBATES IN NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY DURING PAST WEEK, UNPLEDGED UNIONISTS ALONG WITH DEMOCRATIC UNIONIST AND VANGUARD UNIONISTS MEMBERS HAVE BEEN DENOUNCING WHOLE CONCEPT OF POWER-SHARING WITH "REPUBLICAN" SDLP. THERE HAS BEEN SEEMINGLY ENDLESS AND WIDE-RANGING DEBATE ON PAISLEY AMENDMENT TO PROPOSED STANDING ORDERS WHICH "REGRETS THAT THESE RECOMMENDATIONS REFER TO AN ASSEMBLY WHICH WOULD NOT PROVIDE FOR A FULLY DEMOCRATIC PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND" (AMENDMENT WAS FINALLY DEFEATED 46-25 IN OCTOBER 25 VOTE WITH PLEDGED UNIONIST ALLIANCE AND SDLP VOTING DOWN UNCLASSIFIED

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LOYALIST COALITION AND UNPLEDGED UNIONISTS). LOYALISTS CONTENT THAT NORTHERN IRELAND CONSTITUTION ACT DOES NOT GIVE FULL POWERS TO NORTHERN IRELAND GOVERNMENT AND ALLOWS SECRETARY TO FORCE UNNATURAL COALITION BETWEEN SUPPORTERS AND OPPONENTS OF UNION WITH UK. THEY ARGUE THAT THEY ARE NUMEROUS ENOUGH THAT NO SECRETARY OF STATE COULD IN GOOD CONSCIENCE CERTIFY THAT UNIONIST ALLIANCE - SDLP COALITION MEETS TEST OF WIDE ACCEPTABILITY IN SECTION 2(1)(B) OF ACT. THEY CONTENT

THAT FAILURE TO FORM AN EXECUTIVE WOULD FORCE HMG TO THINK AGAIN. SENSITIVE TO CHARGE THAT THEY OPPOSE POWER-SHARING BUT HAVE NO CONSTRUCTIVE ALTERNATIVE THEY HAVE COALESCED AROUND IDEA OF TOTAL INTEGRATION INTO UK AND DIRECT RULE FROM WESTMINSTER IN WHICH NORTHERN IRELAND WOULD BE FULLY REPRESENTED. THEY HAVE ABANDONED THEIR ILL-RECEIVED STRATEGY OF ATTEMPTING TO DISRUPT ASSEMBLY AND ARE CONCENTRATING ON THEME THAT ASSEMBLY BE USED AS CONFERENCE TABLE TO FORMULATE VIEWS ON A "UNITED ULSTER" WITHIN UK WHICH WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE FOR HMG TO IGNORE.

5. PLEDGED UNIONISTS ARE ON DEFENSIVE. NUMBERING 22 JUST AFTER JUNE ELECTION PLEDGED UNIONIST ASSEMBLY PARTY HAS LOST MINFORD TO PRESIDING OFFICERS CHAIR AND NORTH ANTRIM MEMBER BY DEATH IN AN AUTO ACCIDENT. LATTER WILL VERY LIKELY BE REPLACED BY LOYALIST WHEN THERE IS A BYE-ELECTION. OF THE 20 REMAINING, TWO FROM ARMAGH (WHITTEN AND STRONGE) ARE IMPLACABLY OPPOSED TO POWER-SHARING WITH SDLP WHICH THEY CONSIDER INCONSISTENT WITH UNIONIST PARTY ELECTION MANIFESTO REJECTION OF UNIONIST PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT "WITH THOSE WHOSE PRIMARY OBJECTIVE IS TO BREAK UNION WITH GREAT BRITAIN." IF ONE COUNTS THESE AS DEFECTORS PLEDGED UNIONISTS NOW HAVE ONE FEWER THAN SDLP WHICH UNDERMINES THEIR DEMAND FOR AN OVERALL MAJORITY IN EXECUTIVE.

6. MEANWHILE TALKS CONTINUE OVER FORMATION OF EXECUTIVE. IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT FAULKNER WILL OBTAIN ALL THAT HE HAS DEMANDED FROM HMG AND SDLP OR THAT UNIONIST COUNCIL OR STANDING COMMITTEE WILL SETTLE FOR LESS. CURRENT PROSPECTS FOR FORMATION OF EXECUTIVE BEFORE MARCH 1974 DEADLINE MUST THEREFORE STILL BE REGARDED AS LESS THAN EVER.
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